

University of Redlands

InSPIRe @ Redlands

---

Our House Articles, Posters, and Presentations

Our House

---

2019

## "So That Nothing May Be Lost": Gender Diversity and the Divine Image

Wendy Farley PhD

*San Francisco Theological Seminary*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://inspire.redlands.edu/oh\\_articles](https://inspire.redlands.edu/oh_articles)



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Farley, Wendy PhD, "So That Nothing May Be Lost": Gender Diversity and the Divine Image" (2019). *Our House Articles, Posters, and Presentations*. 338.

[https://inspire.redlands.edu/oh\\_articles/338](https://inspire.redlands.edu/oh_articles/338)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License](#).

This material may be protected by copyright law (Title 17 U.S. Code).

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Our House at InSPIRe @ Redlands. It has been accepted for inclusion in Our House Articles, Posters, and Presentations by an authorized administrator of InSPIRe @ Redlands. For more information, please contact [inspire@redlands.edu](mailto:inspire@redlands.edu).

## “So That Nothing May Be Lost”: Gender Diversity and the Divine Image

Wendy Farley

When they were satisfied, he told his disciples,  
“Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.”

—John 6:12 (NRSV)

One of the most powerful things LGBTQ love teaches us is about the beautiful possibility of choosing love that truly invites us to be our authentic selves—choosing a love defined by mutual vulnerability.

—Rev. Dr. Marcia Mount Shoop

I have been asked to write about the relationship between the image of God and gender diversity. At the back of the question connecting gender diversity and the divine image lurks a suspicion that deviation from gender hierarchy is an alienation from the divine image itself; such “deviants” are understood as less human and less available to salvation.<sup>1</sup> If it is believed that women and LGBTQ+ people do not fully image the divine, it is natural to codify this deviance legally and ecclesiastically. The spiritual and material consequences of this withholding of the divine image from an individual or a population are devastating.

---

Wendy Farley is professor of Christian spirituality and director of the Program in Christian Spirituality at San Francisco Theological Seminary. She is professor emeritus in the Department of Religion at Emory University. Email: wfarley@sfts.edu.

Reflective Practice: Formation and Supervision in Ministry

ISSN 2325-2847 (print)\* ISSN 2325-2855 (online)

\* © Copyright 2019 *Reflective Practice: Formation and Supervision in Ministry*  
All Rights Reserved

This is primarily a theological reflection, but I would like to emphasize (the laments of MDiv students notwithstanding) that theology is its own kind of formation. What we believe and the beliefs that are buried in our bones shape us very deeply. The destructive potential of belief is especially acute for people whose gender or sexual identity is interpreted negatively by their religious community. The harm done by dehumanizing beliefs is incalculable. The statistics that remind us of the high rate of suicide among queer youth hardly begin to pull back the curtain on the suffering caused by bad theology.<sup>2</sup> Even those who have left abusive religious communities often retain a remnant sense of their worthlessness or sinfulness. This habitual self-loathing cannot be eradicated by alternative theological insights, but alternatives can undermine the power of internalized beliefs.

This is a pastoral concern not only because issues of gender diversity are now a part of our common conversation but also because we must be relentlessly vigilant to safeguard the vulnerable and despised of every generation. But abusive theology damages also those who defraud members of our human family of respect. The person who harbors hostility to gender diversity suffers an equally devastating spiritual catastrophe, though in an opposite way. As Simone Weil put it, physical or spiritual "violence so crushes whomever it touches that it appears at last external no less to [the one] who dispenses it than to [the one] who endures it."<sup>3</sup> Dorotheus of Gaza also alerts us to the dangers of demeaning others: "Contempt adds to condemnation the desire to set someone at nought—as if the neighbor were a bad smell which has to be got rid of as something disgusting, and this is worse than rash judgment and is exceedingly destructive."<sup>4</sup> Theological violence is a spiritual crisis for everyone and for every system and institution caught in its web. Just as intimate violence has an intensity derived from the very intimacy of the relationship, theological violence maims the spirit in a way that mere insult cannot. It creeps into the very depth of the soul. The message of God's love and the support of a church community—which are as necessary as food is to the body—are replaced by tormenting isolation.

Part of the work of spiritual and pastoral formation is to gather up those who have been rejected or lost. According to John's story, after Jesus fed the five thousand, he instructed his disciples to "gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost" (John 6:12 NRSV). As pastoral and spiritual counselors, as clergy and educators, we must devote ourselves to this gathering up. As Jesus suggests in this story, what appears to be mere

left-fragments are in truth persons of sacred worth. I am saddened that the labor of “proving” that all categories of human beings bear the divine image and are objects of divine tenderness is ever required of us. We must “prove” it as counselors and educators, and we must “prove” it perhaps to ourselves. I will begin simply by affirming my view that to suggest that the divine image is fundamentally marred in any category of person is to fall outside the basic worldview of the Bible and of the Jewish and Christian traditions. As stated in the Reclaiming Jesus confession of faith, “We believe each human being is made in God’s image and likeness (Gen. 1:26). That image and likeness confers a divinely decreed dignity, worth, and God-given equality to all of us as children of the one God who is the Creator of all things.”<sup>5</sup> I say this in a theological (not descriptive) sense: Christianity has long been in the business of creating societies that defraud entire continents, genders, and peoples of full humanity. This negative spiritual habit must be contested on every front. As Shawn Copeland says at the conclusion of a long discussion of Christian homophobia, “*If Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of God, cannot be an option for gays and lesbians, then he cannot be an option. An adequate response to this concern requires [a Christological interpretation] in which we all may recognize, love, and realize our bodyselves as Jesus’ own flesh, as the body of Christ.*”<sup>6</sup> This article is an effort to help to reclaim the beauty and dignity of every human being as bearers of the divine image, not least of women and sexual minorities.

#### A BIBLICAL BACKGROUND?

I am loath to grant much theological insight into the specific issue of gender diversity to biblical authorities. Though this issue is often framed in terms of “traditional” values, there is almost nothing in Scripture that suggests it shares contemporary commitments to consumerism, individualism, the free market, romantic comedies, or marriages entered and exited by the free choice of either party. Dominant biblical models of the family include domestic violence, polygamy, slavery, and the possession of concubines. The use and abuse of Hagar, the gang rape of the unnamed concubine in Judges 19, or Lot’s offering of his virgin daughters to the village mob are unlikely models for the preservation of “family values.” Leviticus’s frequent resort to stoning make it a problematic guide. Neither is the New Testament an un-

qualified help. Jesus sided with women who were socially ostracized. Paul dared envision equality between sexes. But chastity tended to be the preferred way of dealing with sexuality in the New Testament and early Christianity.<sup>7</sup> Since few of us seem eager to reinstate either polygamy or chastity it is unclear why scripture would have unique authority to legislate issues of gender diversity.<sup>8</sup>

*"Let Us Make Humankind in Our Image"*

And yet, these texts retain enormous power to guide, illuminate, and wound us. The story of creation is both a weapon of war and healing balm in conversations about gender diversity, and so it merits closer inspection.

The idea that humanity bears the divine image is central to Christian theology. "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness" (Gen. 1:26). As omnipresent as this passage is in theological anthropology, there is no consensus on its meaning. It might be referring to a particular quality such as reason or free will, or it might be expressing the sacred identity of all humanity. More conservative interpreters see it as a demand for binary, hierarchical gender roles. Biblical scholars note the complexities of these texts. Though these creation stories are used to reify gender and gender hierarchy, Gregory of Nyssa, Origen, and some rabbinic texts anticipated queer interpretation by perceiving androgyny (Gen. 2) as a redeemed state in which gender does not control identity.<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps the more salient point is that the "earth creature" (*ha-adam* in Hebrew) becomes fully human not through gender hierarchies but through affectionate companionship. The *ezer* of Genesis 2:18 is often translated as helper, with the connotation of a subordinate, but it is used elsewhere in Scripture to refer to God's aid to Israel.<sup>10</sup> There is no mention of procreation at this point; as Phyllis Trible notes, "rather, [Adam] abandons familial identity for the one flesh of sexuality. . ."<sup>11</sup>

Turning to religious thinkers, we return to this primacy of relationship. Martin Buber argues that relation is the fundamental truth of human existence. Using neither inclusive language nor gender binaries, he insists, "The fundamental fact of human existence is man with man."<sup>12</sup> Abraham Heschel also identifies connection as fundamental to our humanity. "First and foremost, we meet as human beings who have much in common. . . . A person is not just a specimen of the species called *Homo sapiens* . . . the human is a disclosure of the divine and all [persons] are one in God's care.

Many things on earth are precious, some are holy, humanity is the holy of holies."<sup>13</sup>

Howard Thurman makes a parallel point. The image of God in us is the imagination—the “*angelos* of God”—which creates the miracle of putting oneself in another’s place. This activity of the divine image is not merely projection or prejudgment but true sympathy. “To be to another human being what is needed at the time that the need is most urgent and most acutely felt—this is to participate in the precise act of redemption.”<sup>14</sup> For Laurel Schneider, relation reflects the wildly diverse heart of divinity: “As the conceptual shape of divinity, multiplicity is therefore the embodiment of love. . . . Love, necessitating the existence of others, of difference, gravity, and encounter, is the divine reality of heterogeneity. . . . [A]t its simplest level, ethical ‘love’ is the actualized recognition of the presence of others, acceptance of the dangerous gift of the world itself.”<sup>15</sup> These Jewish and Christian thinkers are emphasizing that the basic truth of creation in the divine image is sympathetic relationship, connections that occur across every supposed boundary or opposition. This capacity for relation is what makes us human embodiments of the divine.

Humanity is created in the image of God but becomes fully human only through relationship. But what to make of “male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27; see also 2:22)? Do these sentences justify gender oppression? Let us glance at the larger context of this creation.

*Gardens and Wilderness: The Primacy of Beauty*

In the mytho-poetic realm of Genesis, the divine image dwells within in a vast, beautiful, and complex world. It is preceded by sun, moon, and stars, waters, growing things, other animals. We humans embody the divine image first in an Edenic garden then in the broad landscape of an often dangerous world. But even in exile and wilderness, creation is beautiful. As ancient writers argue, beauty is the essential quality of divine creativity, and our appetite for beauty is inherent in the divine image.<sup>16</sup> Pseudo Dionysius insists that it is the divine yearning for the ecstatic beauty of beings that calls out divine creativity: “It must be said too that the very cause of the universe in the beautiful, good superabundance of his [God’s] benign yearning [*eros*] for all is also carried outside of himself in the loving care he has for everything. He is, as it were, beguiled by goodness, by love, and by yearning and is enticed away from his transcendent dwelling place and

comes to abide within all things."<sup>17</sup> To exist at all is to exist amidst the vast play of diverse beings that "charm" the unimaginable expansiveness of divine eroticism.<sup>18</sup> Beauty is luminosity, but it is never sameness. Strumming a single note on a guitar cannot make music. A natural setting with only one organism could not last even a day, nor could beauty manifest as a monochromatic unity. Poetically speaking—but also ecologically speaking—our beginning occurs in a world whose purpose is, at least in part, beauty.<sup>19</sup> The existence of each particular being and type of being is necessary for the flourishing of the whole.

It is the human vocation to care for creation. The poetry of this narrative describes a vast and beautiful creation made human-size by a garden given to human companions to care for. This kind of poetry is a "fierce and dangerous practice. . . . [It] has the power to start a fire in your life, it can alter the way you see the world and you may never be the same again."<sup>20</sup> In considering this cosmic framework, we can explore the divine image not as a static quality (rationality, free will, gender hierarchy) but as a vocation to care for and delight in creation and to do so with intimate friends and lovers.

The Genesis description of the first humans is framed in terms of the gender pairing that is obvious in any human society, not least because sexuality and procreation are so central to community. But is the intention of this poetry to circumscribe human flourishing into whatever is specific to these Middle Eastern earth-spirits dwelling in an imaginary land now guarded by angels and burning swords? Or does this pair contain the seed of the great plurality of the human adventure: the tomboys, artists, athletes; the celibates, singles, divorced, parents; the eunuchs, prostitutes, sex-trafficked; the nuclear and extended families, the gray-haired lovers, the trans soldiers, and the polyamorous reformers? Does it include or forbid those who are darker- or lighter-skinned than the ancient tribes of the Fertile Crescent? What shall we make of the Maragoli, the Swedes, the Vietnamese? The story of creation is cosmic: The Beloved delighted to spin into existence the stars and plants, the sporting leviathan, the rain and hail. Look at photographs from the Hubble space telescope; allow your imagination to break apart.<sup>21</sup> And yet, faced with such infinite activity, we simply cannot bear the expansive beauty of creation. We make heterosexual men the synecdoche for humanity, even—blasphemously—for God. But this poetry explodes our ego-centric and anxious categorizations of the world. Must we continue to draw

this great dance into a stiff binary, or shall we learn to delight in the billions of beings that spring forth from this mythical beginning—and praise the mysterious Beloved who endlessly draws beauty from this plurality? Can we wash our eyes so that we recognize women outside of patriarchal theology and asexual, trans, nonbinary, and queer lovers—and much more that we have not found language for—as part of the great beauty of creation, necessary elements in the divine economy of friendship and intimacy?

### THE WORLD IS INCOMPLETE WITHOUT US

The establishment of the Church is re-creation of the world. But it is only in the union of all the particular members that the beauty of Christ's body is complete.

—Gregory of Nyssa

There is a vitality, a life force, an energy that is translated through you into action and because there is only one of you for all time this expression is unique and if you block it, it will never exist and will be lost. You have to keep open and aware directly to the urges that activate you. Keep the channel open.

—Martha Graham to Agnes de Mille

Much that is written about gender diversity has to do with the suffering caused by toxic theology, demeaning treatment, and alienation within church communities—and rightly so. But we must also attend to ways the repression of the insights, wisdom, and resources of the LGBTQ+ community impoverishes all of us. Cynthia Ozick, in an essay on Jewish feminism, describes the “purposive excision” of Jewish women from the “collective endeavor of the Jewish people” as catastrophes “numerically greater than a hundred pogroms.” She adds that this represents “a loss culturally and intellectually more debilitating than a century of autos-da-fe; than a thousand evil bonfires of holy books . . . yet Jewish literature and history report not one wail, not one tear.”<sup>22</sup> If you can bring to mind one charismatic or wise preacher, artist, teacher, activist, spiritual director, parent, pastoral counselor, or retreat leader who is a woman or is gender queer, you must also imagine the tens of thousands who have been silenced, maimed, excised, “disappeared.” The loss to spiritual and religious traditions and to culture itself is incalculable.

Audre Lorde reminds us of the power of the erotic and the urgent need to celebrate and nurture it in all of its forms:

As a Black lesbian feminist, I have a particular feeling, knowledge and understanding for those sisters with whom I have danced hard, played, or even fought. This deep participation has often been the forerunner for joint concerted actions not possible before. . . . Recognizing the power of the erotic within our lives can give us the energy to pursue genuine change within our world, rather than merely settling for a shift of characters in the same weary drama. For not only do we touch our most profoundly creative source, but we do that which is female and self-affirming in the face of a racist, patriarchal, and anti-erotic society.<sup>23</sup>

Gender diversity is a spark of eros that activates creativity and allows "interdependency [to] become unthreatening."<sup>24</sup> Audre Lorde also calls on us to remember images of strength and beauty when we are tempted to become preoccupied with the violence experienced by women and by the LGBTQ+ community : "Where was Afrekte, Yemanje, Oyo, and Mawulisa? Where were the warrior goddesses of the Vodou, the Dahomeian Amazons and the warrior-women of Dan?"<sup>25</sup> In addition to challenging the damage done by withholding recognition of the divine image in others, spiritual formation and pastoral care might also raise up the beautiful beings who can only make their amazing contributions by living into the queer identity that divine goodness has granted them.

A rich literature is also available for queer readings of Scripture and classic texts. Amy Hollywood, Virginia Burrus, and Christopher Hinkle, for example, return to medieval mystics to unpack the fluidity of gender that resides in ancient texts—from Gregory of Nyssa's "Life of Macrina" and "The Making of Man" to the gender-bending language of medieval Beguines.<sup>26</sup> Christopher Hinkle uses the homoeroticism of John of the Cross's mystical ascent as a way of connecting contemplative practice with queer identity. "Given that institutional Christianity represents for many queer individuals the most visible source of oppression, asserting the potential godliness of gay sex from within a Christian framework fulfills a crucial theological and pastoral role." He does not equate sexual desire with divine desire but gently and wisely uses John of the Cross to bring sexual desire into more "discerning alignment with divine desire, to allow the close association between the two to function more effectively."<sup>27</sup>

Queer poets are also voices we must hear if we are to align with our fullest humanity. Our humanity is respiration when we listen to the poignant voice of Jericho Brown, writing from the perspective of an AIDS patient who conflates the powerlessness of the doctor and of God as he struggles for physical, interpersonal, and spiritual healing:

Your healing is not in my hands, though  
I touch as if to make you whole.

Mary Oliver also links love, death, and prayer as she grieves the death of her long-time partner. She begins to understand that everything will be taken away “except the prayers which, with this thirst, I am slowly learning.” Of what beauty, creativity, and wisdom have we been defrauded by the “excision” of female and queer voices? How much beauty and wisdom do we celebrate, without realizing it could only exist because the divine image plays in female and queer forms?

#### THE DIVINE IMAGE AND GENDER DIVERSITY

The theological context for gender diversity is not a rearguard action against biblicist assaults on humanity. Trying to wriggle out of literalism already cedes the possibility that some human beings are secondary to men or heterosexuals. Theology can assist in pastoral or spiritual care by celebrating the female and queer incarnations of the divine image. . It can remind us to delight in the amazing and beautiful variety of human embodiment and relationships. We humans flesh out the bright abyss of the Trinity—enfleshing the divine image in a million different avatars. As Marcella Althaus-Reid writes,

But will the Queer Jesus resurrect? I belong to a community of people who think that yes, the resurrection of the Queer God is not only possible but already a reality. The Queer God is present in every group or individual that still dares to believe that God is fully present among the marginalized, exceeding the narrow confines of sexual and political ideologies. . . . In fact, in every community of excluded people and in every inch of the struggle for sexual and economic justice, the Queer God manifests Godself with full glory, power and grace.<sup>28</sup>

Linking the divine image to gender diversity reminds us that everything is sacred. We remember that each of us images the Trinity; we pos-

sess a secret, unnamable core eternally united to the godhead. We are each a unique and irreplaceable participant in the divine beauty. We share the breath and wonder of spirit as it moves among all beings. Flames of the divine, we are neither isolated individuals nor cyphers of sadistic theology. We are droplets in the great ocean of divine creativity—mysterious, unique, interdependent.

## NOTES

- 1 This essay focuses on gender diversity in the sense of gender minorities and the LG-BTQ+ community. Feminists have been writing about this issue for some time. See, for example, Mary McClintock Fulkerson, who writes, "While not refused the fruits of the *imago Dei*, namely, salvation, women have been viewed by much of the Christian tradition, Reformed and otherwise, as lesser bearers of the image. . . . [S]uffice it to say that the general belief of the church fathers from Calvin through the formative period of American Presbyterianism was that women's nature and place excluded her from positions of authority." Mary McClintock Fulkerson, "The Imago Dei and a Reformed Logic," in *Feminist and Womanist Essays in Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. Amy Plantinga Pauw and Serene Jones (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 2006), 96, 97.
- 2 A recent study in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* indicates that whereas 5 percent of surveyed heterosexual college students had contemplated suicide, 20 percent of bisexual, 17 percent of questioning, and 14 percent of gay and lesbian students had recently considered suicide. In all, some 38 percent of gender minorities described having recent suicidal thoughts. The rate of suicidal thoughts *increased* with the level of importance religion played in their lives. "Questioning youth who said religion was important to them were nearly three times as likely to have attempted suicide recently, compared to questioning youth for whom religion was less important." Carol Kuruvilla, "Chilling Study Sums Up Link Between Religion and Suicide for Queer Youth," *Huffington Post*, April 19, 2018, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/queer-youth-religion-suicide-study\\_us\\_5ad4f7b3e4b077c89ceb9774](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/queer-youth-religion-suicide-study_us_5ad4f7b3e4b077c89ceb9774). "Overall, increased importance of religion was associated with higher odds of recent suicide ideation for both gay /lesbian and questioning youth . . . the strongest effects were among those who reported that religion was very important." Megan C. Lytle, John R. Blosnich, Susan M. De Luca, and Chris Brownson, "Association of Religiosity with Sexual Minority Suicide Ideation and Attempt," *American Journal of Preventative Medicine* 54, no. 5 (May 2018): 644–51, [https://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797\(18\)30050-3/pdf](https://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797(18)30050-3/pdf). Cf. "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Health: LGBT Youth," *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, last reviewed June 21, 2017, <https://www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth/youth.htm> (this article focuses on the effects of bullying and sexual violence experienced by LGB youth). In addition, the National Center for Biotechnology Information reports higher rates of mental health problems, suicide, and substance abuse in LGBT youth than in heterosexual youth. Stephen T. Russell and Jessica N. Fish report that "the lack of support in the fabric of the many institutions that guide the lives of LGBT youth (e.g., their schools, families, faith communities) limits their rights and protections and leaves them more vulnerable to experiences that may compromise their health." They continue, "Studies show that youth who live in communities that are generally supportive of LGBT rights . . . are less likely to attempt suicide." The rejection by family and community also results in homelessness; some 40 percent of homeless youth identify as LGBT. Stephen T. Russell and Jessica N. Fish, "Mental Health in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Youth," *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology* 12 (March 2006): 465–87, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4887282/>.
- 3 Simone Weil, "The *Iliad*, a Poem of Might," in *Simone Weil Reader* (New York: Moyer Bell, 2007), 167–68. Cf. "Such is the nature of might. Its power to transform man into a thing is double and it cuts both ways; it petrifies differently but equally the souls of those who suffer it and of those who wield it" (p. 173).

- 4 Dorotheus of Gaza, "On the Refusal to Judge Our Neighbor," *Discourses and Sayings: Desert Humor and Humility* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1977), 135.
- 5 This is the opening of the "Confession of Faith in a Time of Crisis." See ReclaimingJesus.org.
- 6 Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 78, emphasis in original. Cf. Kelly Brown Douglas: "Only when the taboo of sexuality is discarded will Black women and men be free to experience what it means to wholly love and be loved by the God that became flesh in Jesus." Kelly Brown Douglas, *A Theology of Black Sexuality* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 143. See also Archbishop Desmond Tutu: "I would refuse to go to a homophobic heaven. No, I would say sorry, I mean I would much rather go to the other place. . . . I would not worship a God who is homophobic. That is how deeply I feel about this." "Archbishop Tutu Would Not Worship a Homophobic God," BBC News, 27 July 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-23464694>.
- 7 For example, "The original Christian ideal for sex was a new life beyond it—of a life in which there had never been sexual relations or in which sexual relations had been renounced." Mark Jordan, *The Ethics of Sex* (Malden, MA: Blackwell's Publishing Co., 2002), 47. See also Ken Stone, "Food, Sex and the Garden of Eden," in Ken Stone, *Practicing Safer Texts: Food, Sex and Bible in Queer Perspective* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2005), 26–32. Stone provides a brief summary of the early Christian association of eating with sex and the reasons both should be curtailed or (if possible) eliminated. Gregory of Nyssa provides a particularly sensitive defense of chastity and virginity but nonetheless considers it essential to the fullness of Christian life: "The object of this treatise is to create in its readers a passion for the life according to excellence. . . . [Because of the distractions of secular life,] this treatise would suggest, as a necessary door of entrance to the holier life, the calling of Virginity . . . and so there will follow an inquiry as to the true object of desire, for which (and which only) we have received from our Maker our power of desiring." Gregory of Nyssa, "On Virginity," *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Volume 5: Gregory of Nyssa, Select Works and Letters*, trans. and ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954), 344.
- 8 Mark Jordan points out that the difficulty in finding a simple biblical solution to ethical and social questions is hardly new: "There has never been a monolithic Christian tradition from which dissidents or decadents have departed. There has only and always been a contradictory set of discourses accumulated over time in response to complex and perhaps contradictory authorities." Jordan, *The Ethics of Sex*, 46.
- 9 See, for example, "Michael Carden, "Genesis/Bereshit," in *The Queer Bible Commentary*, ed. Deryn Guest, Robert E. Goss, Mona West, and Thomas Bohache (London: SCM Press, 2006), 26–28;); Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, "Judaism and Christianity on Creation, Cross-Dressing, and Sexuality," *Omnigender: A Trans-Religious Approach* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2001), 91.
- 10 Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1978), 92, 98, 104.
- 11 Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 104.
- 12 Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1965), , 203.

- 13 Abraham Heschel, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, ed. Susannah Heschel (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996), 238.
- 14 Howard Thurman, *The Inward Journey* (Richmond, VA: Friends United Press, 1961), 121.
- 15 Laurel Schneier, *Beyond Monotheism: A Theology of Multiplicity* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 205.
- 16 Gregory of Nyssa argues that the “appetency for moral beauty” is an essential component of the divine image. “The Great Catechism, chapter 21, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series, vol V, under the editorial supervision of Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1954.
- 17 Pseudo-Dionysius, “The Divine Names,” in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 82.
- 18 Note, for example, psalms such as 19, 33, and 104 and Job 38—41. These are among the many scriptural passages that locate humanity in a wild and beautiful world that is unimaginably expansive beyond our small ideas of wrong and right.
- 19 Ferris Jabr, “How Beauty Is Making Scientists Rethink Evolution,” *New York Times Magazine*, January 9, 2019, [https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/09/magazine/beauty-evolution-animal.html?fallback=0&recId=1FaJXh7Isipl7KiOi0clz9Pwzw8&lockeId=0&geoContinent=NA&geoRegion=OR&recAlloc=top\\_conversion&geoCountry=US&blockId=most-popular&imp\\_id=773738099&action=click&module=Most%20Popular&pgtype=Homepage](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/09/magazine/beauty-evolution-animal.html?fallback=0&recId=1FaJXh7Isipl7KiOi0clz9Pwzw8&lockeId=0&geoContinent=NA&geoRegion=OR&recAlloc=top_conversion&geoCountry=US&blockId=most-popular&imp_id=773738099&action=click&module=Most%20Popular&pgtype=Homepage).
- 20 Esther De Waal, *Lost in Wonder* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2003), 28.
- 21 See, for example, the Hubble website: <http://hubblesite.org/images/gallery>.
- 22 Cynthia Ozick, “Notes toward Finding the Right Question,” *On Being a Jewish Feminist: A Reader*, Susannah Heschel, editor, New York: Schocken Boosk, 1983 138. [I am puzzled by this – there is a text with the same title attributed to Adler et al published 2 years later, but the one I have has Susannah Heschel as the editor, with Adler as one of the contributors. ]
- 23 Audre Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic,” *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde*, The Crossing Press Feminist Series (New York: Crossing Press, 1984), 59.
- 24 Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,” in Lord, *Sister Outsider*, 111.
- 25 Audre Lorde, “An Open Letter to Mary Daly,” in Lord, *Sister Outsider*, 67.
- 26 See *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*, ed. Gerard Loughlin (Oxford, England: Blackwell Publishing, 2007).
- 27 Christopher Hinkle, “Love’s Urgent Longings,” in Loughlin, *Queer Theology*, 193.
- 28 Marcella Althaus-Reid, “Indecent, Radical, Queer,” in *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2004), 176.